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Deep Water

The Mississippi River in the Age of Mark Twain

THOMAS RUYS SMITH

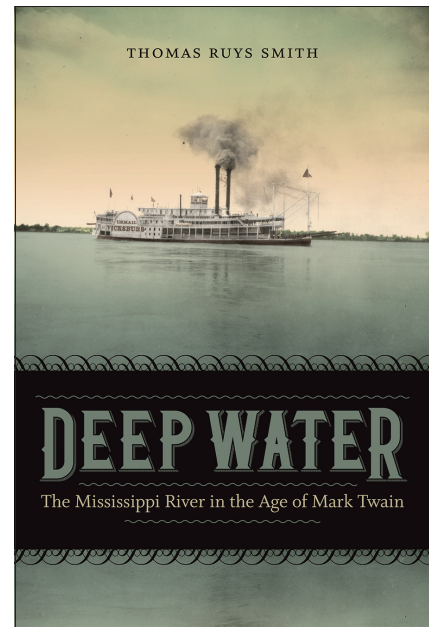
Mark Twain's visions of the Mississippi River offer some of the most indelible images in American literature: Huck and Jim floating downstream on their raft, Tom Sawyer and friends becoming pirates on Jackson's Island, the young Sam Clemens himself at the wheel of a steamboat. Through Twain's iconic river books, the Mississippi has become an imagined river as much as a real one. Yet despite the central place that Twain's river occupies in the national imaginary, until now no work has explored the shifting meaning of this crucial connection in a single volume.

Thomas Ruys Smith's *Deep Water: The Mississippi River in the Age of Mark Twain* is the first book to provide a comprehensive narrative account of Twain's intimate and long-lasting creative engagement with the Mississippi. This expansive study traces two separate but richly intertwined stories of the river as America moved from the aftermath of the Civil War toward modernity. It follows Twain's remarkable connection to the Mississippi, from his early years on the river as a steamboat pilot, through his most significant literary statements, to his final reflections on the crooked stream that wound its way through his life and imagination.

Alongside Twain's evolving relationship to the river, *Deep Water* details the thriving cultural life of the Mississippi in this period—from roustabouts to canoeists, from books for boys to blues songs—and highlights a diverse collection of voices each telling their own story of the river. Smith weaves together these perspectives, putting Twain and his creations in conversation with a dynamic cast of river characters who helped transform the Mississippi into a vibrant American icon.

By balancing evocative cultural history with thought-provoking discussions of some of Twain's most important and beloved works, *Deep Water* gives readers a new sense of both the Mississippi and the remarkable writer who made the river his own.

THOMAS RUYS SMITH, senior lecturer in American literature and culture at the University of East Anglia, is the author of *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* and *Southern Queen: New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century*. He also edited the anthology *Blacklegs, Card Sharps, and Confidence Men: Nineteenth-Century Mississippi River Gambling Stories*.



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